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ONTARIO

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

To Principals of Collegiate Institutes, Vocational, High, and Continuation Schools

Re Departmental Examinations in Upper School English in 1944

The prescription in Upper School English for the Departmental Examinations of 1944 is as follows:

FOR INTENSIVE STUDY

SHAKESPEARE

A play by Shakespeare, not previously studied, selected from the following:

Julius Caesar; Macbeth; Richard II; Hamlet; King Lear; Henry IV, Part I; Henry V; Romeo and Juliet; The Tempest.

LONGER POEMS

Gray	—*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*
Wordsworth	—*Michael*
Coleridge	—*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
Browning	—*Andrea del Sarto*

FOR EXTENSIVE STUDY

Shorter Poems	Part I
Short Stories and Essays:	Part I
Hardy:	*Under the Greenwood Tree*
Conrad:	*Youth*

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STUDY OF SIGHT PASSAGES

Substituted for Passages for Memorization.

Note 1: Although memorization of suitable passages is not included for examination purposes, it is still part of the course of study.

Note 2: Supplementary Reading to be omitted as provided in Memorandum re Courses of Study dated October 26th, 1942, which reads as follows:

"The requirements in Supplementary Reading may be omitted or modified as the Principal may deem expedient."

Two papers will be set: (1) English Composition; (2) English Literature.

Suggestions for Examination questions.

Teachers of English Literature in Grade XIII will note an important change in the prescription of work for 1943–44. As heretofore, a play by Shakespeare forms part of the work but no one play is prescribed to be read in every school. Instead, each school chooses its own play from the following list of nine: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part I*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *The Tempest*. In consequence of this new freedom of choice, there will have to be a marked change in the type of examination question set on Shakespeare. For example, the familiar formula, "Name the speaker, state the circumstances of the speech, and explain the italicized parts", can no longer be used, since there would have to be nine passages, one from each of the nine possible plays. Nine passages would make the paper unwieldy and confusing.

The absence of such questions from future papers, however, does not mean that candidates may from now on neglect the careful study of the text. It does mean that the examiner will have to find equally exacting questions that are applicable to all nine plays. Everyone familiar with the problem is well aware that the examiner's task will not be easy. However, it need not be so difficult as many critics imagine. Examination papers based on a wide option of choice in the texts to be studied have been used for many years in Great Britain and the United States. With the experience of examining boards in these countries to guide him, an examiner in Ontario should be able to set a paper that will be satisfactory to mark and dependable as a test of the candidate's understanding of the play.

As stated above, the candidate should be prepared for a question on the language of the play. It is not difficult to devise language questions that are applicable to most or even to all the plays listed. For instance, there might be a question like this: "Give three examples, from the play you studied, of words, phrases, or expressions that are still used but have not the same meaning now as when Shakespeare used them. Give the present and the Shakespearean meaning of each example you use." This should not be understood to mean an unduly detailed study of words and expressions peculiar to the time of Shakespeare. Again, a question might easily be framed on the humor derived from the misuse or misunderstanding of words or expressions. Such a question could not be answered, however, from every play, though it would be easy for those candidates who had studied any of the several plays in which such humorous effects are prominent. The examiner, in all probability, will find it convenient, and perhaps necessary, to have an (a) and a (b) part in each of the two questions that are usually set on Shakespeare. If a candidate finds it difficult or even impossible to answer (a) on the basis of the play he studied, he will find that (b) contains a question he should be able to answer. In other words, the examiner will have to take great care that any of the nine plays listed above provides the material for answering at least one of the alternatives in each question.

Questions on structure are fairly easy to find. "Show how the opening scene of the play catches the attention of the audience, provides the information necessary to follow the story, and suggests the tone or character of the action." Any candidate could make a passing mark in his answer to that question if he had read the play carefully and had a reasonable amount of intelligence. But those who had studied *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, or *King Lear* would have more and richer material on which to base their answers. On the other hand, a question such as the following might be more readily answered by those who studied another play: "Show how the action of the play is developed by roughly alternating scenes in which different sets of characters appear. How are the two sets connected in the action?" These two examples of the type of question on structure or plot are in themselves enough to show any discerning teacher the kind of preparation candidates will need to make if they hope to do well on the final examination. It is perhaps correct to say that the examination will henceforth put rather less emphasis on mere memory and rather more on reflection about what the candidate has remembered.

There is almost no limit to the range of possible questions on character and characterization. However, it is unlikely that

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candidates will be asked to "give a character sketch" of anybody, for that type of question merely invites the memorizing of what some commentator once wrote about the hero or villain. Questions will be asked in such a way that the candidate in answering will have to marshal the bits of evidence that led him to form the opinion he holds. For instance, there might be such a quotation as this: "The villain is always meant to be hateful but Shakespeare always takes pains to make him credible by showing how he became what he is." The candidate's instructions for dealing with this comment would be something like this: "Discuss the truth of the statement in relation to the villain in your play. Be careful to support your statements by definite references to the text." As any teacher will see, it is possible to find or make up a similar comment on the hero, the heroine, the chief minor character, the clown, or any of several typical characters and then to devise a question based on the comment. The point to note that in his answers the candidate ought to show a close knowledge of the plot, an ability to draw conclusions from the facts, and an understanding of the playwright's artistry.

In short, the new types of Shakespeare questions will not be so different from the traditional ones as to create any serious difficulty for the teacher or candidate.

Toronto, March 31st, 1943.